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India Issues Red Alert as WannaCry Ransomware Hits Sporadically

May 16, 2017

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India's cybersecurity agency has issued a public 'critical alert' asking Indians not to pay a bitcoin ransom if struck by the notorious 'WannaCry' ransomware strain that has hit over a hundred countries around the world.

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India (CERT-In), India's cybercrime agency tasked to combat hacking and phishing while bolstering the nation's cyber defenses has reportedly issued a red-colored 'critical alert' following the spread of WannaCry.

The agency is urging Indian victims to avoid paying the ransom and contact law enforcement for support. ▲

“Individuals or organizations are not encouraged to pay the ransom, as this does not guarantee files will be released. Report such instances of fraud to CERT-In and law enforcement agencies,” the cybersecurity authority stated.

The ransomware threat is particularly predominant in the country, where nearly 60% of Indians use pirated software, according to a 2015 survey. A sizable portion of small and medium industries in the country continue to use pirated versions of the Windows operating system, affording them no Windows updates or patches. This leaves them vulnerable to the exploit enforced by WannaCry, which was patched by Microsoft earlier this year in March. Further, legal experts claim that this category of users suffering losses incurred from WannaCry will not be able to report losses due to the use of pirated software.

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Still, India has predominantly swerved away from the ransomware causing any major damage, save for a few occurrences in a couple of states in southern India.

“There is no major impact in India, unlike other countries. We are keeping a close watch,” stated India’s IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad. “As per the information received so far, there have been isolated incidents in limited areas in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh.”

In the state of Kerala, computers belonging to two village administrations were hit. An official stated:

The four computers were switched on as usual and they were unable to open any document files as the virus displayed messages demanding a payment of \$300 in virtual currency Bitcoin to unlock files and return them to the user. We have informed the district authorities about this.

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outdated and out-of-support Windows XP operating system, stroking fears of an ATM blackout in the country.

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